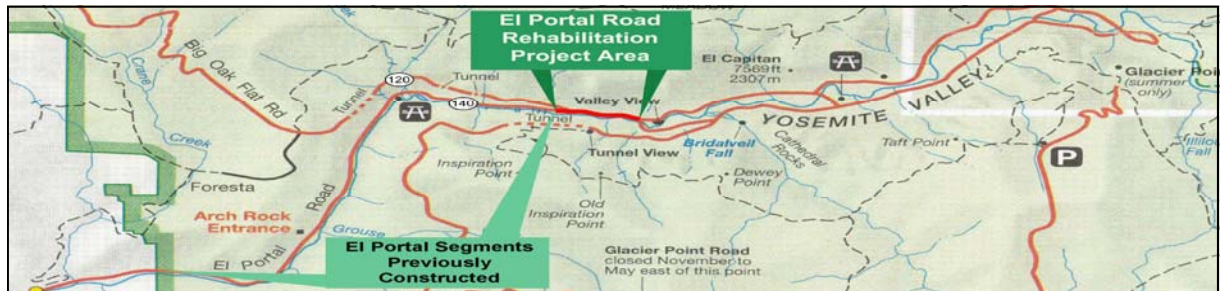




## Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections on El Portal Road

### Where is the proposed project area located?

The El Portal Road begins at the western boundary of Yosemite National Park. This road climbs 7.5 miles through the Merced River canyon, gaining almost 2,000 vertical feet before it intersects the Yosemite Valley Loop Road at Pohono Bridge. Along the way, this road parallels the Merced Wild and Scenic River and passes Arch Rock Entrance Station. The proposed project area would begin at the Big Oak Flat Road intersection and extend east 1,350 feet. It would focus specifically on those areas in need of emergency repair.



### Why undertake this project now?

Significant damage occurred during the 1997 flood, necessitating an almost complete reconstruction of the El Portal Road. Since then, the National Park Service has rebuilt the westernmost 6.5 miles of the road—referred to as Segments A, B, and C—but prior to completion, reconstruction of the final one-mile segment of the project, referred to as Segment D, was halted as a result of a successful legal challenge. The court decision directed the National Park Service to prepare a comprehensive management plan for the Merced Wild and Scenic River in advance of completing that project.

In the intervening nine years, the roadway and embankment have continued to be undermined by the river. As a result, the National Park Service has completed five emergency repairs to the current project area, including three retaining wall repairs to prevent roadway collapse. However, these emergency repairs have not addressed the fundamental instability of the roadway and cannot eliminate the potential for a complete roadway failure. Such a failure could endanger motorists, cause a long-term road closure, and potentially sever Yosemite Valley's primary electrical and sewage lines, which would have serious environmental consequences for the Merced Wild and Scenic River. This segment of the road serves three of four park entrances; a roadway collapse would prohibit access to Yosemite Valley from those entrances.

While the original project that entails completely reconstructing the entire road segment is on hold pending the approval of a valid Merced River Plan, the National Park Service is addressing the immediate situation by planning a scaled-down reconstruction project that would stabilize the roadway, protect park resources, and ensure continued visitor access to Yosemite Valley. Other issues not directly related to the emergency repairs, such as intersection configuration, bicycle lanes, and parking will not be addressed at this time.



*A portion of the undercut roadway bank.*

## What alternatives have been developed?

The public scoping period took place from November 11 to December 29, 2006. Following the scoping period, the National Park Service analyzed the comments that were received from the public and identified a range of issues and concerns. The issues and concerns were then used to inform the development of alternative approaches to reconstruct this portion of El Portal Road.

In February and March, 2007, the National Park Service convened experts in natural and cultural resources, construction and engineering, and park operations and transportation planning to develop a range of reasonable and feasible alternatives based on the project's purpose and need as well as input gathered during public scoping. After analyzing a number of potential solutions, the park identified two reasonable and feasible action alternatives that are analyzed in detail in the *Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections of El Portal Road Environmental Assessment*.

The **preferred alternative** would reconstruct the road with 11-foot travel lanes, a paved drainage ditch at the road's edge, and a short cantilever road section at the roadway's narrowest point. The **other action alternative** would also involve a short cantilever section and a new paved drainage ditch, but would have 10-foot travel lanes. The two action alternatives would involve almost identical short-and long-term impacts, but the preferred alternative would improve driver safety due to the more appropriately sized travel lanes.

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## What are the next steps and how can I get involved?

The *Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections of El Portal Road Environment Assessment* is now available for public review. Comments will be accepted from June 4 until July 3, 2007. You can request a draft by mailing or emailing your request to the address listed below.

Additionally, there will be 2 public meetings for this project in June:

- **Wednesday, June 20, 2007** from 4-7pm in Mariposa at the Government Building, 5100 Bullion St
- **Wednesday, June 27, 2007** from 1-5pm at the Open House in Yosemite Valley Visitor Center East Auditorium

A link to project information is posted on the park's website at [www.nps.gov/yose/planning/eproad/](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning/eproad/)

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## Public Participation

Public participation is essential for the success of this and all other park improvement projects. Here are some ways to stay involved in this project and its planning process:

- Attend a National Park Service public open house to talk with project specialists and obtain more information on the project. Visit the park's planning website (listed below) for upcoming dates.
- Add your name to the park's planning list and receive the *Planning Update* newsletter as well as other planning-related notices. You can also submit your email address to receive the park's periodic electronic newsletter.

Mail: Superintendent

Attn: *Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections of El Portal Road*

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- Visit online: [www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning)
- Web: A new way to submit comments is available online. It's called PEPC (Planning, Environment, and Public Comment). Access the site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yose>